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ABSTRACT

This paper positions action research within the wider field of teacher education, raising problematic issues inherent in the process of institutionalizing this form of teacher research. The paper also offers a self-study of the researcher's own practice. It considers teacher education in its broad sense as a continuum of ongoing professional learning, from preservice education through the end of the teacher's career. Within this framework, the paper explores the impact of action research as a significant professional learning strategy and questions how this form of teacher learning might be shaped by its inclusion in standards of practice for the teaching profession. The paper begins with a narrative account of the researcher's reflections on her role at the Ontario College of Teachers, then goes on to describe the process and findings of her conversations with the field and to highlight emerging issues within the continuum of teacher education. It establishes connections among the standards of practice, ongoing professional learning, and action research, highlighting questions raised by institutionalizing action research. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario

Ontario College of Teachers: Action Research and Standards of Practice: Creating Connections Within the Ontario Context

Frances A. Squire

Paper presented at the
Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices
Second International Conference
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ACTION RESEARCH AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE: CREATING CONNECTIONS WITHIN THE ONTARIO CONTEXT

FRANCES A. SQUIRE
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I write this paper with two purposes in mind. The first is to position action research within the wider field of teacher education raising the problematic issues inherent in the process of institutionalizing this form of teacher research. The second and more personal rationale is to initiate a self study of my own practice, beginning to make sense of my recent move from a school context to a new workplace culture where I am investigating the connections among action research, professional learning and standards of practice. In this paper I consider teacher education in its broad sense as a continuum of ongoing professional learning from pre-service through to the end of the teacher's career. Within this framework I explore the impact of action research as a significant professional learning strategy and question how this form of teacher learning might be shaped by its inclusion in standards of practice for the teaching profession.

The questions posed are complex and emerge from my work at the Ontario College of Teachers. What implications arise when standards of practice are linked to action research endeavours? How do we keep the spontaneity and individualism inherent in action research as we establish criteria for its recognition in the educational community? In this paper I establish the theoretical, political and practical contexts for these questions by first connecting action research, standards of practice and the mandate of Ontario College of Teachers. To position this work within the field of self study research, I begin with a narrative account of my reflections on my role at the College. I go on to describe the process and findings of our "conversations with the field" and highlight the emerging issues within the continuum of teacher education.

THE RELUCTANT BUREAUCRAT

Picture this 50 +++teacher, Dr. Squire, in her first full time office job. No longer in the academic world, no longer in the world of schools, not even associated with the ministry, she struggled to retain her teacher perspectives in the unfamiliar world of bureaucracy. To some of her peers her new job did not count as real. Positioned firmly in her 10 x 10 work station, surrounded by demanding technology, she nonetheless celebrated the acquisition of her own phone, something unattainable in 33 years of teaching. From her vantage point on this new landscape she watched and listened to what was happening in the world of education, but this time she did not automatically accept or become what she saw. Questions surfaced at every turn. She was concerned about the mixed reviews the College was getting from the field. How could she share with her peers her beliefs about the positive new directions of the College? The task of writing the standards of practice seemed so overwhelming that she concentrated on the part of her job she knew best, teachers, research and schools.

She was responsible for establishing connections between ongoing professional learning and the standards of practice for the teaching profession. Focusing on one example of this type of learning she explored the field of "action research" in Ontario, working with exemplary teachers who were engaged in this form of research based professionalism. She watched and learned and began to absorb the passion and enthusiasm these educators were feeling about their work in schools. She saw that the teacher researcher movement based on teaching as a form of inquiry was challenging the traditional ideas of teacher development as fixing up "deficit teachers". Teachers were saying things like:

- *This kind of learning celebrates the professional teachers knowledge.*
- *This kind of ongoing learning allows me to construct my own meanings.*
- *I don't have to rely on outside experts.*
- *The most effective body of knowledge about the teaching profession lies within the teachers themselves.*

The teachers with whom she worked were making connections to the standards of practice by studying and inquiring into their own practice, taking ownership for that practice and creating their own professional learning agendas. They were also concerned about how their work would be recognized, acknowledged and valued. How would it count?
And she was asking,
How do we keep the spontaneity and individualism inherent in initiatives like action research as we establish criteria for their recognition in the educational community?
How can we keep the teacher's voice as we frame policy for professional learning?

It was indeed questions like these about the context of professional learning that prompted me to leave my teaching role last year and join the staff of the Professional Affairs Department at the Ontario College of Teachers. The College is the professional self-regulatory body founded in 1996 to license govern and regulate the practice of teaching in Ontario. The 165,000 members of the College include classroom teachers,

administrators, superintendents, Ministry of Education and Training staff, Community Colleges, Faculty of Education staff and others who hold Ontario teaching qualifications. An important part of the college's mandate is to provide leadership to the profession in developing standards of practice for the profession and a framework for career long professional learning. The college recognizes that establishing standards for the teaching profession will help generate a common understanding of what makes being a teacher a unique professional experience. As members of a self-regulating body, teachers would now have the opportunity to define and describe their own profession. They would have the opportunity to claim the autonomy the profession deserves. Rather than another tedious layer of bureaucracy, I saw within the College a way of making sense of the multiple strands of my teaching life, strands which could now culminate in making a contribution to the field of professional learning. I felt strongly that teachers voices should provide a foundation for policy decisions. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) advocate the idea of professional self-regulation and urge teachers to support the work of "raising the standards and public image of your profession developing powerful approaches to and expectations for professional learning and bringing about changes that really benefit students" p. 103. I wanted to be in on the ground floor of this opportunity. I knew that I could draw on my experience in professional development; little did I realize how much I would learn about politics and policy making.

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Beginning to work in a unit called Standards of Practice and Education, my first task was to figure out why we were engaged in writing standards. What were standards of practice for the profession? I first explored the concept of a self regulatory organization A self-regulatory body must be able to articulate what it is that makes that body unique. In our case it means answering the questions "What makes being a teacher a unique professional experience?" Why can't any other caring adult who has a university degree be designated "a teacher"? Professional self-regulatory bodies most often use the term "standard of practice" to refer to the descriptors which answer these kinds of questions. In the case of teaching we can speculate that the description might include statements

about areas such as knowledge of subject matter, commitment to student learning, leadership, learning community and professional learning.

We have established a set of guiding principles for creating standards of practice for the Ontario context. By defining the characteristics and qualities our society understands to be the basis of effective teaching, teachers may articulate publicly and passionately just what it means to be a teacher. The standards of practice when developed will describe in broad terms what it means to be a member of the teaching profession in Ontario. Drafted with substantial input from the profession and the public, they will recognize and value diversity in teaching and are based on the premise that enhancing professional competency is a developmental process. The task will not be easy. It cannot be done in isolation. If it is to be more than empty words printed on a page, it is not one that will be done quickly. It is crucial that teachers themselves have a voice in determining and creating the professional standards that will describe the essence of our profession. I began to understand that this ability to define our profession is a fundamental step in the process of self-regulation.

My own self-study took on steep learning curves as I began to consult the field about what they understood by standards within a self-regulatory body. It became evident very quickly that standards often carried a negative connotation bringing images of measurement, evaluation and objective descriptions of quantitative relationships. On the other hand, Eisner 1995 explains that the term is attractive to many people because standards imply high expectations and rigor, things of substance. Eisner goes on to suggest that the meaning of the term is not self evident. Our research feedback told us that teachers were more comfortable with the notion of standards as descriptors of practice for the profession rather than checklists of individual teacher competency. In the Ontario context the standards will articulate the goals and aspirations of a profession with a mandate to foster learning.

With these guiding principles in mind, we began to consult hundreds of educators across Ontario in what we called "conversations with the field." Our research strategies

included focus groups, discussion groups, writing teams, individual interviews, telephone interviews, presentation feedback, site visits and web site responses. A rich and extensive database has provided a solid grounding for our work. Our first research inquiries centered around seven themes that emerged from our initial review of standards documents from other national and international jurisdictions, including Alberta, the United States of America, England, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand. Although there were considerable differences in the form, language and function of the standards documents, repeated themes focused on issues like commitment to student learning, professional knowledge, leadership and community, teaching practice and ongoing professional learning. Teachers, principals, superintendents, consultants and members of the public have articulated clearly in our research activities what standards created around these themes would mean to them in the context of their roles. My particular task is to consider standards of practice in the context of action research through these preliminary themes. Action research was chosen as a significant example of a teacher-directed, school-based, professional learning that focuses on and validates everyday practice.

LINKING STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

And what do standards have to do with professional learning? The standards, once they are in place, will provide the foundation for ongoing professional learning. Standards-based professional learning places the locus of control with the teaching profession. It is teacher driven. As members of a self-regulating body teachers can assume control over their own professional learning agendas to meet and respond to exacting and challenging standards of practice. To facilitate this ownership, the College is creating a collaboratively designed professional learning framework that will provide a context of coherence and priority within which teachers individually and together can establish their own professional learning plans. Professional learning is understood as a continuum of growth from pre-service to retirement based on continuous improvement of practice for the benefit of student learning. The content may vary as will the way individual teachers engage in professional learning. The constant will be that professional learning is directly linked to the standards of practice for the profession.

Providing a broad range of learning opportunities, many of which are embedded in daily practice, the framework will address contextual factors such as career cycles, learning styles, school and system supports or mandated policies. The framework is seen as a viable way for Ontario teachers to make the standards their own, to work out what the standards mean to their individual practice. Action research has been highlighted as the first exemplar of learning in practice for this framework and I was asked to take the lead in this exploration.

When I began the task of investigating action research I knew little about it in a formal sense but as I learned more I realized, like many colleagues, that I had indeed been involved informally in action research as a self-study of my own practice for many years. I just hadn't called it that. As I explored the literature on action research and connected with educators engaged in action research across the province, I found a variety of approaches and definitions. (McNiff, 1988, 1998; Sagor, 1992; Whitehead, 1993; Calhoun, 1994; Russell, 1995; Delong, 1995, 1998; Hannay,1998). Often called reflective practice, teacher research or school-based collaborative research, action research is conducted by practitioners who want to do something to improve their own practice. One commonly held understanding seems to be that action research describes professionals studying or reflecting on their own practice in order to improve it. Action research is a process of inquiry rather than a program and its principles can be applied anywhere within the educational community. In Ontario, action research is being implemented by individuals and groups of educators at the pre-service and in-service levels, within graduate school programs and within collaborative school-based initiatives at both the elementary and secondary panels. Positioned within the broader field of teacher development research, action research is seen as a viable way for teachers to research and explore their own work instead of looking to "outside experts" for theoretical answers. Respecting the professionalism of teachers by validating their experience and practical knowledge, action research also allows teachers to model the kinds of learning experiences they encourage for students. Action research offers teachers and teacher educators an opportunity for individual professional growth through ongoing dialogues with people and texts and an equally important opportunity to create a learning community within a school.

Although there has been considerable attention in current educational literature to issues of theory and practice in action research, (Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994; Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Burnaford, Fischer & Hobson, 1996; Delong & Wideman, 1998) little has been written on the relationship of action research to the standards of practice for the profession. I wanted to see if action research as a self-directed form of professional learning could assist educators in reaching individual goals based on the standards the College was developing. I knew that I could draw upon the many contacts with action researchers throughout Ontario that I had established during the first five months of my job. My network consisted of pre-service teacher candidates, teachers, faculty, superintendents, principals, ministry representatives and program co-ordinators. Some action researchers were beginning the process, others were third year veterans of this form of ongoing learning. Some had voluntarily chosen action research to pursue questions of classroom practice; others were introduced to action research as a required component of another program. Five groups were selected to accommodate a range of experience, diversity of role and demographics. (See Appendix A). The two beginning researcher groups were facilitated in a taped, informal discussion group format; the more experienced group contributed in a formal focus group methodology; while two heterogeneous groups participated in a writing team strategy.

I felt it would be useful to get at the connection between action research and the standards of practice in several ways. In one instance focus group methodology was chosen because, as Morgan & Krueger (1998) suggest, "Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them" (p. 9). I asked purposeful questions to gain insights into the participant's beliefs and attitudes about ongoing learning and standards of practice. The focus group responded to prepared questions like: How does action research support the idea of commitment to student learning? How can action research play a role in building a capacity for leadership? The discussion groups dealt with questions and issues emerging from the group; however in concluding the sessions I asked specific questions about how their action research supported the themes. The writing teams were directed to select a theme and explore in written form how action research connected with the standards of practice by

composing a standards statement, describing a rationale, creating a narrative example or exemplar, predicting outcomes and posing a set of questions for further discussion. The findings from the analysis of the taped conversations and work groups confirmed the strong links between action research and standards.

The focus group educators were all involved in action research at the school or system level. Their responses, often told as stories, focused on how they saw action research supporting each theme. They perceive action research as a powerful strategy to work with the themes in their practice. Presented below is an excerpt from the executive summary of the transcript relating to the theme of "Commitment to Student Learning". The participants saw action research supporting the theme in the following ways:

- *self reflection is the idea of being committed to teaching ALL children*
- *commitment to student learning is fundamental in action research.*
- *action research is very practical…looking directly at students learning*
- *dealing with real issues, real students, not just theory*
- *questions are generated through classroom and student learning*
- *action research based on student feedback, reflecting, revising*
- *direct relationship between student learning and action research/ creative, divergent, a personal response to each student*
- *modeling life long learning through action research*
- *action research makes us test assumptions…reveals surprises*
- *action research invites risk taking, making mistakes...a powerful concept for student learning*
- *action research shifts the old paradigm of teaching to a new one of teacher as learner.*

A common strand emerging from this group was the notion of the school as a learning organization and how action research could play a defining role in that structure. It is important to note that this group was visibly and actively supported in this idea by their superintendent whose enthusiasm was felt in a very tangible way. Although the focus of this session was a discussion of standards themes, participants expressed a passion and commitment for their work and how their teaching had been enhanced through involvement in action research. One elementary vice principal participant put it this way:

There is nothing more powerful for student learning than for a teacher to go in and say "I'm here learning too" and that modeling of learning is continual. I think that's very powerful and different from the old paradigms of teaching when the teacher was not a learner with the student. Action research enhances our commitment to student learning.

The writing teams at Queen's University and the Grande Erie District Board of Education were deliberately focused on the connection between standards and action research. The Queen's University group was composed of students in the pre-service program, experienced teachers taking masters level courses, two beginning principals, and representatives from the Francophone community. In this case the Queen's professor, involved in a self-study of his own teaching practice, acted as a catalyst in moving action research forward. The Grande Erie group was an enthusiastic research community as well, acknowledging the leadership of their actively involved superintendent, who was modeling her own action research project for staff. To share the high level of teacher writing emerging from our work groups I present two samples of the draft documents created. The first was written by Lori Barkans, a primary teacher in Grande Erie in collaboration with her superintendent Jackie Delong. They saw action research supporting the growth of a learning community.

Creating a Learning Community

STANDARD	Action Research creates and supports a collaborative learning community for the purpose of improving student learning. It encourages sharing and dialogue among the members of the learning community. [students, peers, parents]
RATIONALE	The Action Research process recognizes that everyone has a contribution to make to student learning. By bringing together the knowledge and experience of each member of the community, including students, parents, community members, teachers, support staff and administration, the combined learning is greater than that of the individual. Action Research builds a body of educational knowledge created by practitioners that is essential to the improvement of learning and the growth of the teaching profession. Action Research supports school improvement through research based professionalism.

	Action Research develops a culture of research based learning through action/reflection cycles. The action research question is developed from the concerns of the individual group based on the areas they see as needing improvement. Action Research demands data collection and analysis and ultimately sharing in order to answer the question *How can I (We) improve student learning.*
EXAMPLE	At Branlyn school our project is now closing in on its third year. We focussed in on the question – *How can we assist at-risk children to meet the learning outcomes in reading by grade 3?* Our research team consisted of 3 primary teachers with the same concern. We conducted research with the support of our Principal and Superintendent. The team researched and selected a reading program called "All Star" which involved a 'team' approach. Volunteer parents were an integral part of the implementation of the strategy, the reflection upon its impact and success, with success defined as children improving their reading. Change was documented through careful records and assessments kept by parents, children and teachers. The initiative has become a part of our regular practice in the primary division at Branlyn Community School.
OUTCOMES	Some of the evidence is the quantitative data collected through pre-test, continuous and post-test. More important, a number of the 'focus' or at-risk children are reading and are able to write and talk about what they've read. The evidence is found in parent and volunteer comments, in classroom teacher reflective journals and observations, and in children's self-evaluation. Our means of sharing our learning include published accounts: *Act, Reflect Revise, Revitalize*, 1996 and *Action Research: School Improvement through Research Based Professionalism*, 1998; newspaper interviews, workshops, video and teleconference. We believe that we've contributed to the body of the educational knowledge of the professional educator. We feel we've grown as professionals, better able to meet the needs of our community and improve the learning of our children. We've firmly established a reflective method of evaluating our teaching practices and implementing change. We're able to offer support to others interested in pursuing change in this manner and improving the learning of our children. We continue to grow and learn along with our children.

	As a learning community we were able to affect profound change which as individuals we would not have accomplished. We grew in confidence – professionals, volunteers and children – as we all realized we had the skills and knowledge to improve student learning. The experience was enlightening – a realization of potential.

The second document was written collaboratively by Jackie Decker, a pre-service candidate and her faculty advisor, Tom Russell, as they reflected on their experience as a beginning teacher and a professor using action research as a learning strategy.

Required Professional Knowledge

STANDARD	Action research provides the experiential base for a beginning teacher's professional knowledge.
RATIONALE	Asking action research questions of one's personal classroom experiences generates the questions, needs, challenges and topics for pursuing the professional knowledge required for teaching. This leads naturally to more meaningful and relevant discussion of a broad range of theoretical positions.
EXAMPLE	Consider a student teacher in secondary science who wishes to create a more student-centered classroom by making laboratory work more self-directed. A fall-term placement of 14 weeks required an action research project as part of a field-based course. Asking questions from an action research perspective generated a clear sense that laboratory work can and should be more open-ended, to help move students from answer-seeking to problem-solving. During the subsequent winter-term courses, the new teacher finds that the action research project has generated important questions to focus her professional learning: • What are other strategies for increasing student responsibility in the classroom? • How can student work be assessed to reflect the increased responsibility? • How do these new practices fit into my personal philosophy of teaching?
OUTCOMES	• Action research provides the beginning of a professional development journey in which the individual teacher recognizes the directions in which professional knowledge should develop.

	• Professional knowledge includes a set of resources that answer questions grounded in the personal experience of action research. • Time spent in a Bachelor of Education program requiring action research becomes more meaningful because it includes elements of self-directed learning for the new professional.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	• Does personal experience informed by a required action research project inspire all new teachers to take greater control of their professional learning? • How can a B.Ed. program best support and sustain the perspectives that action research provides for the development of professional knowledge?

The salient questions posed at the end of the participant documents have highlighted areas for further inquiry as we begin to field test the draft standards in practice. From the results of our research groups it was clear that action research can be a viable way for teachers to integrate the standards of practice into their own practice. Teachers articulated through their writing and conversations how they saw action research supporting the preliminary themes of the standards of practice and how standards of practice were visible in action research.

From conversations with the field I have come to understand how action research is, for many teachers, a powerful strategy in this process of making sense of the standards. For example, when practitioners reflected on the benefits of action research, they highlighted the positive sense of control over their own learning, set within educational contexts all too often negative. The teachers spoke of :

- *an increased sense of professionalism ,"ownership and the process of empowerment";*
- *the sense of being a reflective practitioner, "being pushed to rethink main messages";*
- *teacher knowledge "the most effective body of knowledge about the teaching profession lies within the teachers themselves";*
- *collaboration, "allows me to validate the personal and professional experiences of others in a meaningful way";*
- *the connection to student learning ,"the ultimate beneficiary of action research is the student!"*
- *knowledge of research skills, "I now use data to better plan and make decisions".*
- *managing the change process, "Action research provided a forum in which I could take risks."*

(These findings related to the top benefits of action research are presented more fully in visual form in Appendix B).

Reflecting back on the standards themes of student learning, professional knowledge, leadership, community and ongoing professional learning, we can see how the same themes emerged from this indirect analysis of the teacher's conversation. Through my "research on action research" I was coming to understand how action research informed the creation of the standards and how the standards in turn, informed action research. Informed by the action researcher's perspectives, I was more confident to take on the responsibility of defining professional learning on paper.

We are now engaged in the actual writing of the standards of practice, an awesome and challenging task, a task however made easier and more credible by the substantial input from the field. A second task will be to produce an exemplar of action research for the professional learning framework based on the work of the research groups. With the framework we must come to grips with questions of recognizing, acknowledging and valuing action research within an institutional context. And so we are beginning to think about the next step. If action research is a powerful process for reflection and learning that honours teachers professionalism, if action research can be a way to individualize the standards, then how do we encourage its growth as a professional learning strategy? How can it be defined? What criteria should be used for its recognition and who should set the criteria?

An important criteria for a self-regulatory body is the ability of the profession to assume the responsibility for the transmission of the knowledge, skills and values to its members through ongoing professional learning. In Ontario, this means that the Ontario College of Teachers has now assumed the responsibility for the accreditation of pre-service education programs at the Faculties of Education in Ontario Universities. It also means that the College will accredit in-service professional learning. In-service learning includes Additional Qualifications Courses currently offered through the faculties, the Principal's Qualifications Program and the Supervisory Officer's Qualifications Program. The College may, in future, also accredit other forms of

professional learning such as conferences, institutes and workshops. Another challenge will involve identifying ways to recognize and value the crucial ongoing learning that takes place in practice. Action research, mentoring, computer networking with colleagues are examples of this type of ongoing professional learning. How will practitioners be recognized and acknowledged for their work in these forms of personal inquiry?

The teachers in our research groups expressed concerns about action research becoming institutionalized if set criteria were established for possible accreditation by the Ontario College of Teachers. Would action research lose its individual quality if it was "co-opted" by educational managers and policy makers as suggested by Elliot 1989, cited in Cole & Knowles, (1996)? Would action research lose the very essence that has captured the imaginations of so many educators? Offering some alternatives, McNiff (1998), advocates recognition for who we are and what we do. "We need to develop new metaphors –networks of people generating interchanging and testing knowledge and experience and validating each others claims .....what is at issue is what is accredited, how it is judged and who judges."(p. 100).

The following comments emerging from the discussion groups reflect the complexity of this issue from the practitioner's perspective.

- *Do you really want to do that? Recognize? One thing I like about this is the intrinsic part. You are doing it for yourself. You're motivating yourself. You're not expecting someone else to do it. So I think there is a strength in it. Action research is all about improving and self motivation.*
- *I think recognition might get people doing things just to jump through more hoops.*
- *If we put too many restrictions on AR it will lose its value!*
- *The reward in itself is the process of going through it working with other teachers on professional development.*
- *This is what I can do. This is my job. I'm proud of it but I still can make it better for my students. That's the value of action research.*

On the other side of the issue many teachers wanted formal recognition of some kind, a credit comparable to an Additional Qualifications course or a notation on their teacher's record card.

- *Recognition is needed for AR. I spent the same number of hours as I would have for an academic course. Formal accreditation is needed for our work.*
- *Through documentation teachers can verify the hours they have spent on their own professional development.*
- *We want our action research accredited by the College as an important part of our research.*

Most agreed that sharing the results of action research was a necessary step in the recognition process whether that sharing occurred in a small staff presentation or at an international conference. Publishing, presenting and peer and parent recognition all rated highly as alternative ways that participation in action research could be valued by the educational community.

- *I think its nice to be able to share…informally..... with others in my intermediate division.*
- *Sharing must be voluntary…we can't impose our methods for sharing. Most important of all is that the people doing it, value it.*
- *Sharing should happen on a stage that is comfortable for the individual.*
- *By sharing the research teachers could come to the forefront of developing educational knowledge….who knows better about how classrooms work than teachers?*

Cole, (1997) argues that reflective practice has garnered little institutional support as an accepted form of professional learning. Trying to give that support, the college is faced with the dilemma of encouraging reflective practice while struggling with the issues of institutional recognition. It was important to me to assure that institutional support was meaningful and based on our data. I did not want our involvement with action research to be perceived as yet another short lived, mandated fad. To further our understanding of the recognition of ongoing professional learning we will draw on continued input from the field and the research of practitioners like Delong and Wideman, (1998). They suggest that criteria such as the following might guide the development of professional standards in action research:

Teachers will be able to:
- *assess the effectiveness of their own practices in promoting student learning*
- *identify questions about their practice to guide inquiry into improving their own teaching, learning assessment and/or evaluation*
- *select, adapt, and develop strategies to improve practice (p.107)*

Going on to include ethical considerations, data gathering strategies, recording and sharing results, Delong and Wideman provide a useful framework for teachers to assume responsibility and accountability within their practice through action research. These kinds of field-based findings will guide our ongoing inquiry into professional learning, standards of practice and the everyday contexts of teachers' work in schools and institutions.

In this paper I have described the collaborative process of creating standards of practice for the teaching profession in Ontario. I have established connections among the standards of practice, ongoing professional learning and action research, highlighting some of the questions raised by institutionalizing action research. By exploring and describing my role at the College I have attempted to personalize the issues we are confronting in a new culture of teaching and professional learning. Hundreds of members of the College and the public are currently continuing the dialogue, assisting staff and the political committees to answer the question, "What does it mean to be a teacher?" Amid the diversity of conversation a consistent theme emerges from the reflective and personalized responses. Professional learning is an integral part of teaching. Learning is an integral part of what it means to be a teacher.

This image of the teacher learner and the understandings about the nature of teacher learning were reinforced through the data gathered from the educators so passionately involved in action research. The image, understandings and the Ontario data provided the rationale for the inclusion of a statement in our first draft of the standards of practice for the teaching profession (July 1998) highlighting the importance of ongoing professional learning. It reads:

> **Teachers engage in a continuum of professional learning. They acknowledge the interdependence of teacher learning and student learning.**
>
> **Key Elements**

1. **Teachers committed to ongoing professional learning:**

   (a) understand that professional learning is an integral part of teaching and is directly related to student learning;
   (b) understand that teaching is a dynamic, changing profession, responsive to personal, social and political contexts;
   (c) understand that teaching practice is enhanced by many forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and ways to access that knowledge;
   (d) draw on and contribute to various forms of educational research to improve their practice;
   (e) anticipate and plan the kinds of learning they will need to respond to a variety of educational contexts;
   (f) engage in a variety of meaningful learning opportunities both individual and collaborative that are integrated into practice for the benefit of student learning;
   (g) reflect on their practice and learn from experience;
   (h) create opportunities to collaborate with colleagues; and
   (i) act as role models who build and confirm the idea of lifelong learning.

Teachers who engage in self study practices, and I include action researchers in that group, act as role models of lifelong learning for their peers and their students, contribute to teacher generated educational research, reflect on their practice and learn from experience. They understand the importance of personal and collaborative teacher learning. We heard their stories of experience and included their words in the draft standards. We will listen to their words again as they give feedback on our first efforts.

And what about my own stories of experience? I have learned much in my own journey from teacher in a Grade eight classroom to teacher in a downtown office. Positioned on the ground floor of a new organization I have an opportunity to shape the culture of our first self regulatory body, ever mindful of my classroom roots and my vision of teacher as learner. In turn I am being shaped by the new culture in which I am immersed, becoming attuned to political nuance and the broad perspectives of Ontario education. The intense team process of developing the standards of practice has been a highlight of my career in education. The educators with whom I have worked have enriched my understanding of professionalism and challenged me to continue learning about action research and self study practices. I anticipate that the process of field testing the draft documents will be an equally exciting challenge. In my role at the College I will

continue to promote the emerging image of professional learning to ensure the concept of being a teacher includes the notion of teacher as learner.

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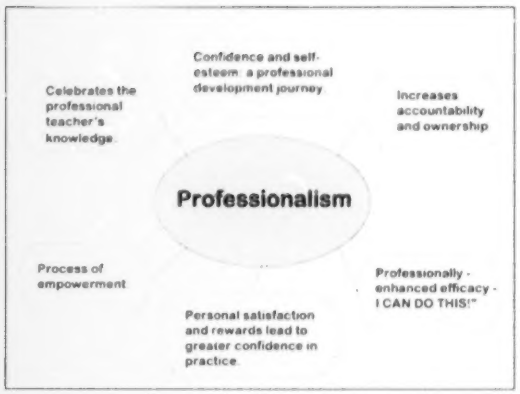
APPENDIX A

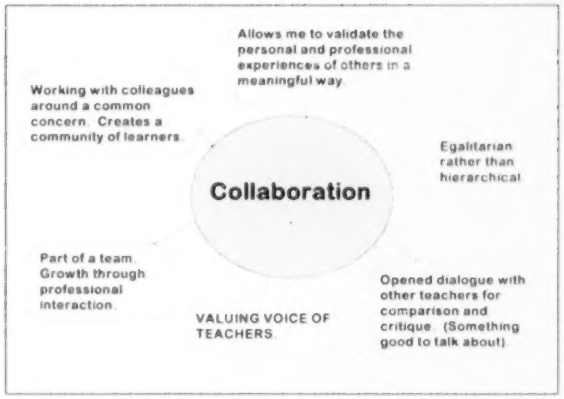
PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

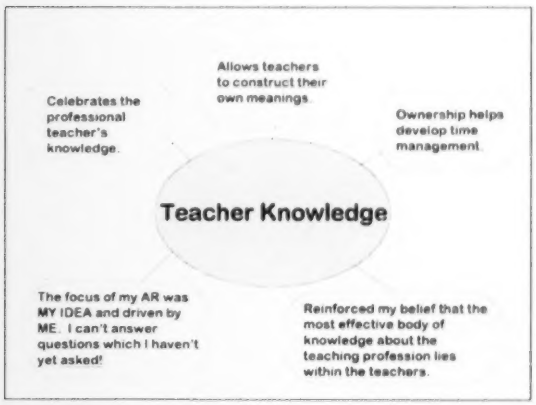
Activity	Topic	Date	Location	Participants
Interviews and Writing Teams	Standards of Practice/Action Research	January 28, 1998	Brantford	Grand Erie District School Board superintendent, teachers, principals, program consultants
Taped Discussions and Interviews	"	February 2, 1998	North Bay	Nipissing -Parry Sound Catholic District School Board teachers, principals, program consultants
Focus Group	"	February 9, 1998	Kitchener/ Waterloo	Waterloo District School Board teachers, superintendent, principals, program consultants
Taped Discussions and Interviews	"	February 10, 1998	Clinton	Avon Maitland District School Board teachers, superintendent, principals, consultants
Writing Teams and Interviews	"	February 20, 1998	Queen's University, Kingston	Faculty, pre-service students, teachers, administrators

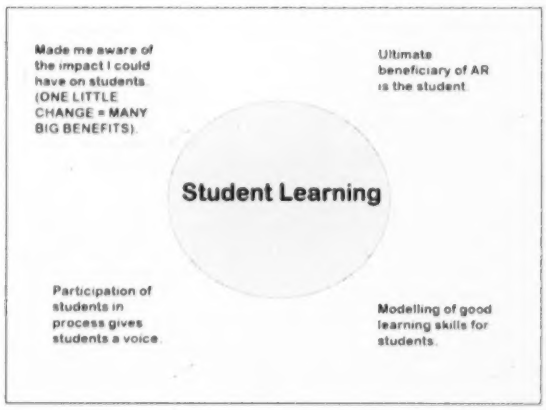
APPENDIX B

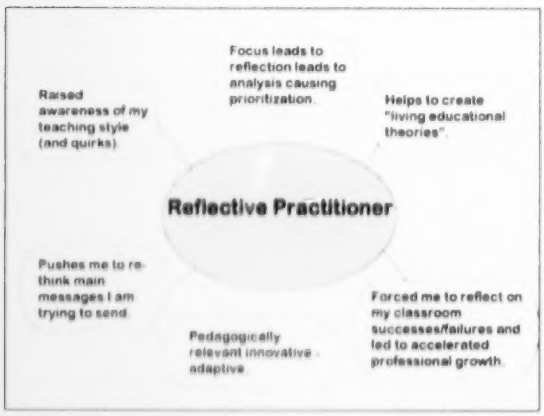
TOP 7 BENEFITS OF ACTION RESEARCH


Professionalism
Confidence and self-esteem: a professional development journey.
Celebrates the professional teacher's knowledge.
Increases accountability and ownership.
Process of empowerment.
Professionally - enhanced efficacy - I CAN DO THIS!"
Personal satisfaction and rewards lead to greater confidence in practice.


Collaboration
Allows me to validate the personal and professional experiences of others in a meaningful way.
Working with colleagues around a common concern. Creates a community of learners.
Egalitarian rather than hierarchical.
Part of a team. Growth through professional interaction.
VALUING VOICE OF TEACHERS.
Opened dialogue with other teachers for comparison and critique. (Something good to talk about)


Teacher Knowledge
Allows teachers to construct their own meanings.
Celebrates the professional teacher's knowledge.
Ownership helps develop time management.
The focus of my AR was MY IDEA and driven by ME. I can't answer questions which I haven't yet asked!
Reinforced my belief that the most effective body of knowledge about the teaching profession lies within the teachers.


Student Learning
Made me aware of the impact I could have on students. (ONE LITTLE CHANGE = MANY BIG BENEFITS).
Ultimate beneficiary of AR is the student.
Participation of students in process gives students a voice.
Modelling of good learning skills for students.


Reflective Practitioner
Focus leads to reflection leads to analysis causing prioritization.
Raised awareness of my teaching style (and quirks).
Helps to create "living educational theories".
Pushes me to re-think main messages I am trying to send.
Forced me to reflect on my classroom successes/failures and led to accelerated professional growth.
Pedagogically relevant innovative - adaptive.

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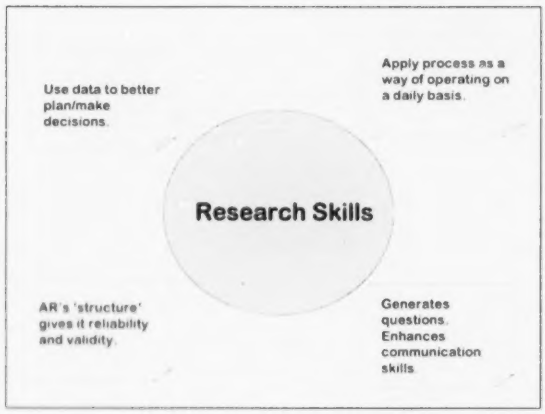
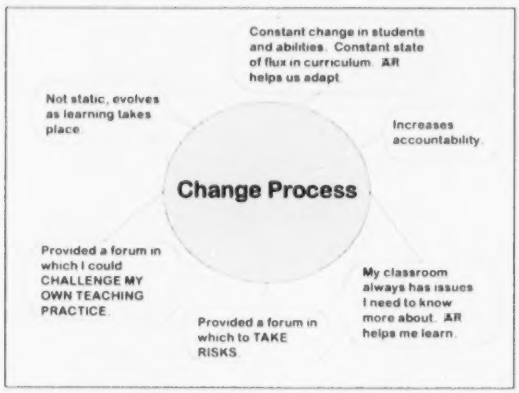

Use data to better plan/make decisions.
Apply process as a way of operating on a daily basis.
Research Skills
AR's 'structure' gives it reliability and validity.
Generates questions. Enhances communication skills.


Constant change in students and abilities. Constant state of flux in curriculum. AR helps us adapt.
Not static, evolves as learning takes place.
Increases accountability.
Change Process
Provided a forum in which I could CHALLENGE MY OWN TEACHING PRACTICE.
My classroom always has issues I need to know more about. AR helps me learn.
Provided a forum in which to TAKE RISKS.